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OF ARMY
NURSING

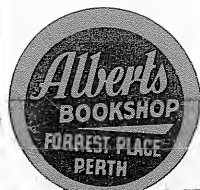
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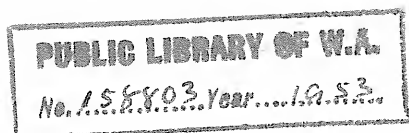
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ARMY NURSING

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ARMY NURSING

*The Story of the British Army Nursing Services
from the time of Florence Nightingale
to the present day*

by IAN HAY

(Major-General John Hay Beith, C.B.E., M.C.)



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MARLBOROUGH HOUSE
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"One Hundred Years of Army Nursing"
is a memorial to the work achieved since the
leadership of Florence Nightingale.

This book should be a source of pride
to Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing
Service and an inspiration to Queen Alexandra's
Royal Army Nursing Corps.

I send them all my good wishes and
the assurance of my confidence that they will
uphold the traditions of the Corps of which I
am proud to be Colonel-in-Chief.

October, 1952.

DEDICATED

*To the Members of the Army Nursing Service who gave
their Lives in the Second World War, 1939-1945.*

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FOREWORD

THIS book, in tracing the history of the Army Nursing Service from its beginning in the Crimea to the present day, shows what a long and weary road it has traversed from Florence Nightingale and the Institute of Protestant Deaconesses at Kaiserwerth to the Advanced Operating Centres of the last war and the Depot and Training Establishment of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps; from poke bonnets and long full skirts to steel helmets and battle-dress.

There were many factors to make that progress slow of which the most potent was the status of women in a society completely dominated by men. Hence the passion and prejudice engendered in many occupying high places in the medical and military professions at the intrusion of women into their domain. These old, long-drawn-out disputes are rightly dismissed summarily in this book, for the issues now seem so obvious that one is left wondering what it was all about—'so much as there is of passion so much there is of nothing to the purpose.'

The milestones on the road were the Commissions of Enquiry into the inadequacy of the medical services which were set up with monotonous regularity after every campaign, the Crimea, South Africa, Dardanelles, Mesopotamia. They make sad and sorrowful if salutary reading, and their lesson was learnt so very slowly.

Much of the progress of medicine is also implicit in these pages, for the story starts before anæsthetics were in general use, before Lister had paved the way for modern surgery, when hospitals were hotbeds of infection, when pain and death held sway. And so to the days of blood transfusion, modern anæsthesia, penicillin, highly-trained nurses, the conquest of pain and death and, in the 1939-45 war, the recovery of ninety-four per cent of all wounded who reached the medical services alive. In every phase of this progress the nursing service played an important part. After the South African War, the advance became

more rapid. In 1902 the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service was established and, in 1908, the Territorial Army Nursing Service. Then came the 1914-18 war in which over 10,000 trained nurses were serving and, significantly, they were now employed in Casualty Clearing Stations in advance of the base hospitals. But still their official status in the Army was unsatisfactory; they were serving with the Army but were not an integral part of it. The 1939-45 war brought the nursing service finally into its own; the nurses obtained commissions and the principle was accepted that danger should not be a reason for barring their employment where they were needed. And soon the Army became so conscious of their great value that Corps and Divisional Commanders planning a battle began to display great interest in the siting of Advanced Operating Centres with nurses on their staff. The tale of their services in peace and war—Mons and Dunkirk, Gallipoli, Salonika, Mesopotamia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Burma, the desert, Greece, the beaches of Anzio and Normandy, Malta and on the high seas—reveals one clear outstanding pattern of devoted service regardless of self. This book shows that in each of the two great wars, 220 members of the nursing services lost their lives. In the second great war battle casualties were more numerous and deaths from disease fewer, because campaign diseases were under better control and the nursing services were more exposed to enemy action.

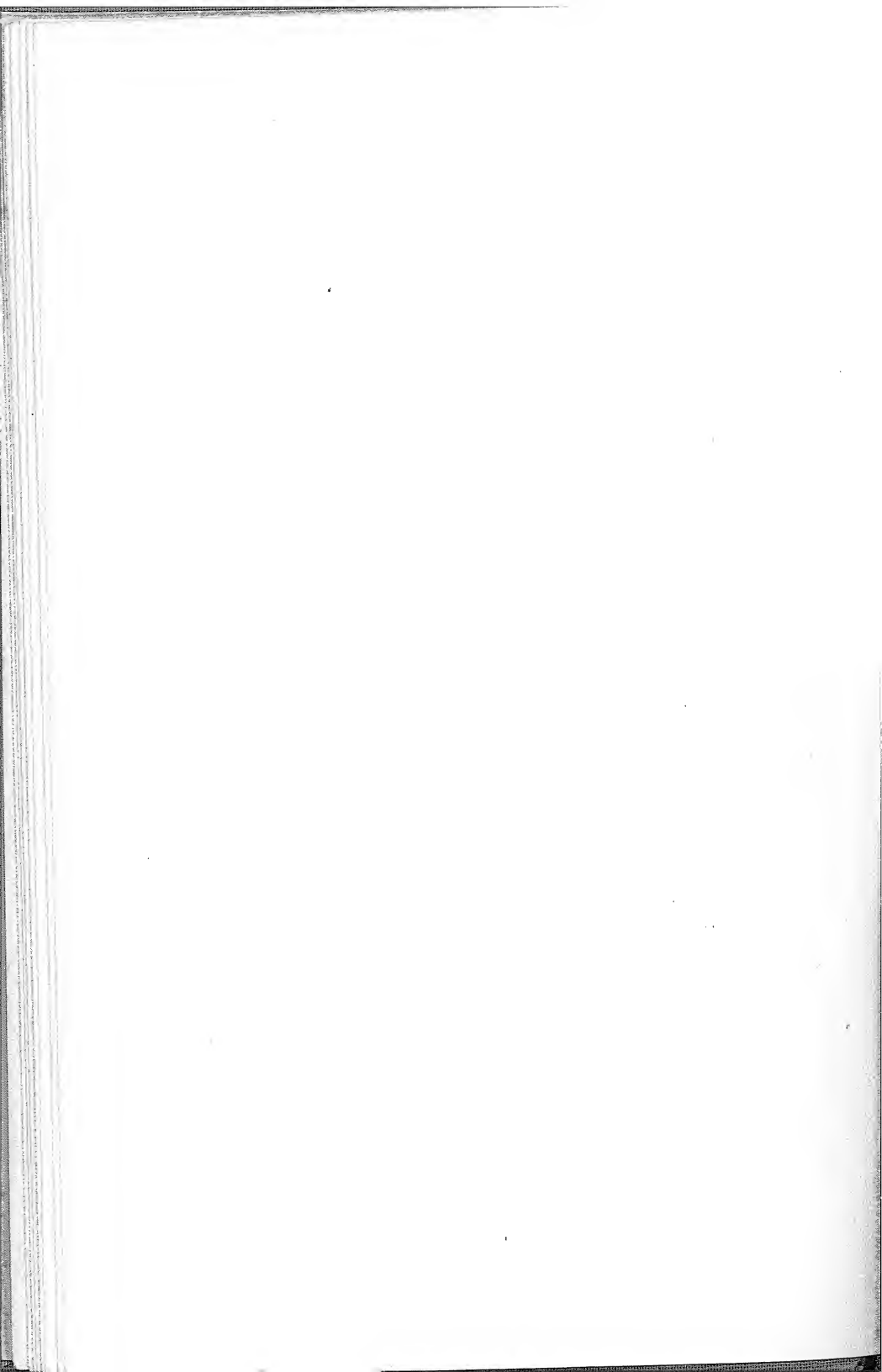
This book is part of the Memorial to Army Nurses who lost their lives in the wars. Those who died in 1914-18 are commemorated in St. Paul's Cathedral, in the Chapel of the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, Millbank, London, in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, in St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, and in St. Asaph's Cathedral, Flint. They are also remembered in the Five Sisters Window in York Minster and in the Scottish National War Memorial on the Castle Rock, Edinburgh. Those who died in the 1939-45 war are commemorated in the Chapel at Millbank, in the restored Cathedral in Rangoon, in the Memorial Hall being erected at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore, and they share with all other nurses the Nurses' Memorial Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

Thus they are remembered and recorded in rock and stone, in glass and parchment, for all time; but the real memorial is in the appreciation, esteem and gratitude of the armies they served so well and in the hearts of so many of their fellow countrymen who owe their lives to their courage and devotion and who carry with them for ever memories of their care and skill in every theatre of war. Those of us who worked with them for a lifetime, in peace and war, in defeat and victory, at home and abroad, knew them, not as heroines which many of them were, but as highly skilled, courageous, conscientious colleagues, reliable and undefeatable, equal to all emergencies, on duty always. They had a tremendous task, they served a great cause and now they are part of the Army. The Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps is an autonomous corps within the framework of the medical services, with its own officers, and other ranks, a depot, a corps march, a flag, and a great tradition. The Army and the nation have every reason to be proud of their nursing service for what it has done in the past, and to look forward, confident, that Army Nursing, on a secure foundation, will progress from strength to strength, and be ready and willing to meet all demands in the future.

ALEX. HOOD.

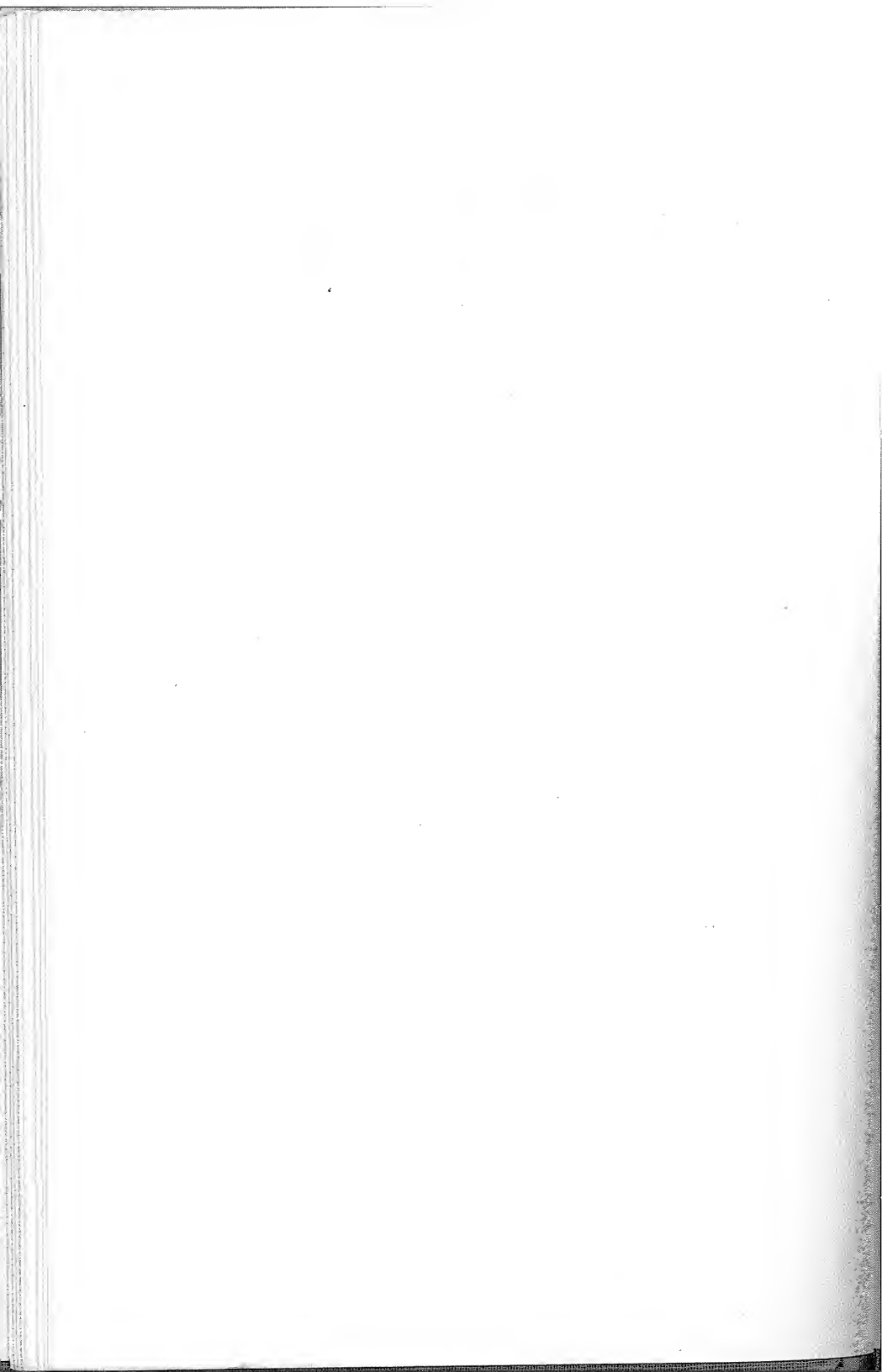
Government House, Bermuda.

6th January, 1953.



Part One

AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL



CHAPTER 1

EARLY MEDICAL SERVICES

THE soldier's expectation of life in time of war is admittedly a precarious one, and is duly accepted by the soldier as such; but in time of peace, with the abundance of fresh air and physical exercise afforded by his calling, he can reasonably expect to find himself standing high in the category of general health.

This, however, has not always been the case in the history of the British Army, for the simple reason that until a century ago the bodily health of the common soldier was left to take care of itself; which means that no care was taken of it at all.

There were several contributing factors. In the first place soldiers must be regularly and adequately fed: but for two centuries our Army catering arrangements were of the most haphazard description. When serving overseas in time of war—and fortunately, so far, it has never had to serve anywhere else—the Army lived to some extent upon the country in which it was fighting, but for the most part it was almost entirely dependent for its daily bread upon the enterprise and generosity of its leaders. (That magnificent machine the Royal Army Service Corps was not fully assembled until 1888.) The general practice was to employ the services of a civilian Commissariat Officer, or Purveyor, who accompanied the regiment upon active service and was responsible for its supplies of food, liquor, and forage. From time to time, we read, a General threatened to hang a Commissary, a circumstance which gives us a fair idea of the efficiency and integrity of such gentry. In any case a soldier's rations, consisting as they did mainly of salt beef and ship's biscuit, were monotonous in the extreme and a standing menace to digestion.

In addition to fighting and eating, a soldier must occasionally have somewhere to lay his head.

Not that this view was supported by the military authorities of that time. In their opinion a 'marching regiment' was not a regiment at all unless it was kept continuously on the march. Soldiers therefore had no settled quarters: they were billeted, as occasion demanded, on ale-houses. Permanent barracks were regarded with disfavour, as tending to breed softness of fibre and lessen martial ardour. In the time of Queen Anne (and consequently of the great Marlborough himself) the total barrack accommodation in the United Kingdom provided for no more than five thousand men. It was not until the days of Pitt, and the period of general uneasiness caused by the French Revolution, that barrack buildings were set up throughout the country to accommodate troops which might be required (since in those days no regular police force existed) to maintain order among the civil population.

No Army cooks were provided; the men themselves took that duty in turns, with results easily imagined. In any case a man went without food from noon every day until next morning. His only solace was drinking—fiery poison supplied to him by a sutler who had paid a fee to the authorities for permission to sell the stuff.

The alternative to these not very exhilarating conditions was a period of garrison duty abroad. How desirable that alternative was can be gathered from the fact that when a regiment went overseas it was apt to be kept there indefinitely, amid surroundings usually unhealthy and frequently pestilential, where men died steadily of yellow fever and dysentery. The 38th Regiment of Foot, now the 1st Battalion, the South Staffordshire Regiment, were sent to the West Indies in 1706 and remained there for sixty years, completely forgotten. Such regiments, too, as did come back were mere relics of their former selves. The Cameron Highlanders were once so reduced by privation and disease during a period of duty in the West Indies that the survivors of the rank and file were actually transferred *en bloc*

to the Black Watch. However, the officers and non-commissioned officers returned to Scotland, where they ultimately found recruits and saved a famous regiment from extinction.

II

So much for the life of the common soldier in time of peace. War-time brought with it the added risks of death or wounds. Treatment of the latter was of the most rough and ready character: field hospitals were non-existent, and ambulance work almost entirely without order or method. The wounded were tended by orderlies, usually selected for the job as being unfit for any other, working under the regimental surgeon. There were of course no women nurses, though there was no lack of female society; for until a century ago women—not merely the camp-following sisters of tradition, but respectable wives and mothers—accompanied our troops, as the merest matter of course, overseas and practically into action. In other words, a regiment on active service took its married quarters with it—only there were no quarters. But they hung on somehow, these heroic British matrons, in the wake of the men who made their world. And they took the children with them. What else could they do?

Here is an incident, probably common enough, occurring during Sir John Moore's historic retreat, in the dead of winter, to Corunna. A soldier's wife, who had been trudging for days at her husband's side, suddenly slipped apart from the slow-moving throng and lay down in the snow not far from the edge of the road. Her husband fell out and joined her, while the others stumbled on in the gathering darkness. Next morning man and wife overtook them, the woman carrying a newly born child in her arms.

That was the stuff of which those wives and mothers were made. But as already noted, they took no official part in the Army nursing services of their time. Such participation would have been regarded as improper and immodest. The very last

place for a respectable woman, it was held, especially a young woman, was by a man's bedside.¹ That conviction was to die hard, as we shall see.

III

Such were the conditions under which British soldiers lived and died, without any particular protest, for the best part of two centuries. Their hardships were as a rule considerably mitigated by the kindness and care of their officers—an immemorial tradition of the British Army—and the friendly attitude of the civil population, with whom they seldom failed to establish good relations, whatever the country, friendly or hostile. But the system itself remained, unchallenged and unaltered.

The men themselves never appear to have asked for more considerate treatment. They were inarticulate individuals, almost without education, and had been accustomed to discomfort and privation from birth; so they probably accepted their hard lot as one of the inevitabilities of a soldier's life.

Where appreciation of the situation should have existed, and the urgent need for reforming it realized long, long ago, was in the War Office itself. But the War Office, right up to the middle of the nineteenth century, lay fast bound in the fetters of an almost unworkable constitution. So the common soldier was nobody's child.

Then, suddenly, in 1854, we found ourselves involved in the Crimean War. This war differed from all its predecessors in one vitally important respect; it was the first war fought and followed under modern methods of reporting and publicity. In other words, the civil population at home were for the first time enabled to follow the progress of the campaign, in considerable detail and with a time-lag of not more, sometimes, than a few days.

We were living in a new era now—the era of railway and

¹ Still, in the interests of historical accuracy, it may be noted, according to the records, that through the influence of Elizabeth Fry some nurses were employed in military hospitals in 1799.

steamship communications, and above all of the newly invented electric telegraph. Gone were the days when the sole source of public information as to the progress of a war consisted in an occasional Commander-in-Chief's Official Dispatch, announcing operational successes to date, and conveniently ignoring, or minimizing, such uncomfortable topics as the casualty-list or the sufferings of the troops engaged. Soldiers, too, were better educated, and could write home letters containing items of first-hand and highly personal information, of a kind which no Staff Officer would dream of embodying in a Commander-in-Chief's Dispatch.

Above all, that new and portentous product of modern journalism, the War Correspondent, had appeared upon the scene, penetrating everywhere, noting everything, and flashing his impressions home by the electric cable. Neither was he content to limit himself to discussing the strategy and tactics of the higher command. He mingled with the troops, both officers and men, in camp and trench; he visited the wounded in hospital, listened to their troubles, and duly passed everything on to his editor. For the first time in our military history the public at home were presented with a picture of war, especially a mis-handled war, entirely from the point of view of the men who had to wage it—a very different saga from such contemporary effusions as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

The effect was sensational. Hitherto the easy-going British nation had been content to accept the comfortable view of the official bulletins—after the Battle of the Alma, for instance—that 'such a victory could not be achieved without considerable losses'; but the dispatches contributed to *The Times* newspaper by its special correspondent, William Howard Russell, were much more specific. Russell contended, firstly, that our casualties were far greater than they need have been, and then proceeded to condemn, in no uncertain terms, the shameful inadequacy of the arrangements for the care of the wounded.

After the troops have been six months in the Country [he wrote from the Crimea on September 12th, 1854], there is

no preparation for the commonest surgical operations! Not only are the men kept, in some cases, for a week without the hand of a medical man coming near their wounds; not only are they left to expire in agony, unheeded and shaken off, though clutching desperately at the surgeon whenever he makes his rounds through the fetid ship; but now, when they are placed in a spacious building,¹ where we were led to believe that everything was ready which could ease their pain and facilitate their recovery, it is found that the commonest appliances of a workhouse sick-ward are wanting, and that the men die through the medical staff of the British Army having forgotten that old rags are necessary for the dressing of wounds. . . .

The worn-out pensioners who were brought out as an Ambulance Corps are totally useless; and not only are surgeons not to be had, but there are no dressers and nurses to carry out the surgeons' instructions.

Then the dispatch struck a fresh and significant note.

Here the French are greatly our superiors. Their medical arrangements are extremely good, their surgeons more numerous, *and they have also the help of the Sisters of Charity*, who have accompanied the expedition in incredible numbers.

The importance of this statement lay not in the 'incredible numbers' of the Sisters of Charity—in point of fact the exact total was fifty—but in the news that there were women nurses in the Crimea at all. Here was a clear lead to the British medical authorities; surely, what a Frenchwoman could do, an Englishwoman could do.

But the appropriate response was not immediately forthcoming—on any concerted scale, that is. True, Russell's revelations had been sufficient to arouse the entire country both to anger and pity; but the anger merely took the form of a vague demand for immediate reform of the Army medical services. Pity was re-

¹ At Scutari.

sponsible for the immediate establishment of a public fund by *The Times* newspaper for the provision of more abundant medical comforts for the sick and wounded in Scutari. But that was all. The authorities still fought shy of the suggestion implied in Russell's mention of the fifty Sisters of Charity. The strange belief that the nursing of sick men was somehow unbecoming to the modesty and even chastity of English womanhood still persisted in official circles. The French Sisters of Charity, it was asserted, belonged to a different category; they were Catholic nuns, self-dedicated to lifelong service in such work as this; they were beings in fact, hardly of this world at all. But ought delicately nurtured and sensitive English ladies to be committed to such distressing and 'unsexing' labours as these?

Still, public opinion had been coming round to the idea for some time, and Russell's continued revelations brought the matter to a head. All that was needed now, to blow a hoary prejudice sky-high, was an effective detonator.

As it happened, such a detonator was already in being, and two days after the publication of Russell's article of September 12th, it went into immediate and resounding action. The name of the detonator was Florence Nightingale.